



THE STRESS OF LEISURE

Soft Approach

(TSOL Recording Co.)

From the opening strains of first track, the hazy, shoegazy *Somewhere In The Afternoon*, it's clear that The Stress Of Leisure's third album *Soft Approach* is going to be another very special set of songs. There have been changes in the band's line-up since 2008's *Hour To Hour* – Jessica Seitz and Ben Moore are now the permanent rhythm section, while sisters Almaryse and Pascale Burton provide backing vocals throughout. But otherwise it's business as usual for The Stress Of Leisure: wonderfully crafted, esoteric rock tunes, all grounded in the (relatively) fresh mythological territory of Brisbane, Australia and all delivered with Ian Pownes' distinctive, anxious voice – somewhere between Roberts Smith and Forster.

Each song here holds a surprise – those that initially seem upbeat regularly have a sting in their tail in the form of a minor key chorus, a dark couplet or an eerie synth line (see especially *The Boy's Got Issues*), while those that begin with edgy guitar riff can often give way to some sugary backing vocals (*On The Weekends* and single *Death On The Magic Mile*). *All Australian Punk Band 1979* comes across funnily enough like The Saints meets Swervedriver; *Shy* features an insanely catchy new-wave guitar hook; and the acoustic *Kids By The River* dissects Pownes' teaching day-job with a vivid, autumnal, self-deprecating air.

Throughout the record Pownes filters his observations into acutely realised vignettes that often reveal a devastating core of bleak existential angst (see *...Magic Mile's* "And I don't know how to feel this anymore/If it's all down to this nothingness". Ultimately however this is an uplifting album. Fans of the Flying Nun label, Guided By Voices and Brisbane's own Dollar Bar will find much to love here. *Soft Approach* is a truly amazing album from a woefully under-appreciated Australian band.

★★★★½ Ben Salter